



## Neighbors Planning Neighborhoods (NPN)

Working Together to Build a Great City

**Neighbors Planning Neighborhoods** is a partnership of Nashville's neighborhoods, Neighborhood Resource Center, Nashville Neighborhood Alliance, Metropolitan Planning Department, the Mayor's Office of Neighborhoods and the Metropolitan Development & Housing Agency.

**Our mission is to provide training and support services that enable neighborhood organizations to create and implement self-directed neighborhood plans and programs, thereby improving the quality of life in their neighborhood.**

We believe that this will be accomplished by:

- a) Ensuring that planning is user-friendly and understandable
- b) Instilling a spirit of self-determination
- c) Creating Citizen Planners
- d) Ensuring that the process is neighborhood driven and that it results in tangible benefits that are seen as such by the neighborhood
- e) Facilitating the identification of common interests
- f) Engaging citizens with government and other agencies in a participatory process
- g) Assisting neighborhoods to engage in real partnerships with government and other agencies in order to achieve their self-determined goals

### **History of Nashville's Neighborhood Organizations**

Presently, there are over 200 neighborhood organizations in Nashville, up from only 12 - twenty years ago. Twenty years ago, many of the organized neighborhoods were historic neighborhoods that began organizing due to pressures of dilapidated housing and crime. People saw the success of working together – "Being able to do together what one cannot do alone!" Since the thrust was engaging neighbors in group action, soon suburban neighborhoods joined in. Despite some victories being possible through neighborhoods working with local councilmembers (Nashville has a 40 member city council), often neighbors found that the government that was supposed to serve them did not always do that. So neighbors united to create an organization that would advocate for the interest of residents, and the Nashville Neighborhood Alliance (NNA), an all-volunteer umbrella group, formed.

Today approximately 169 neighborhood groups participate in the Nashville Neighborhood Alliance. In the 1990s, NNA leaders were receiving many calls for help from residents who wanted to begin neighborhood groups or form organized neighborhood groups that needed assistance with specific problems (zoning, crime issues, etc). An all-volunteer group could not keep up with all of these requests, so in 1997, the NNA, with the help of Council of Community

Services and Family and Children's Service, created the Neighborhoods Resource Center (NRC) to provide experienced organizing staff and technical assistance to neighborhood groups.

Since its inception, the Neighborhoods Resource Center has assisted neighborhoods throughout the city in dealing with zoning, crime, and neighborhood conditions. Leadership Training events have been sponsored quarterly, and the NRC has also become a recognized expert in applying Geographic Information Systems (computer mapping) to assist neighborhoods and social service organizations. The NRC has provided maps of crime and various other data to neighborhoods and to neighborhood-oriented agencies as they plan actions to improve their communities. The NRC has also worked with the Mayor's Office of Neighborhoods, the Metro Planning Department, other Metro and non-profit agencies, Tying Nashville Together, and various congregations.

Since its inception in the 70s, the Nashville Neighborhood Alliance's overall goal has been to engage neighborhood organizations in action that leads to the improvement of life in both individual communities and in Davidson County in general. From a small group of about 6 neighborhood organizations taking action to what is today over 160 different groups — the NNA has led the way in making this outcome a reality in neighborhoods throughout Davidson County. Their list of accomplishments is too long to detail here — however, the clearest example of its impact can be seen in the political and social service landscape of Nashville. This is now a city led by a "Neighborhood Mayor" and one whose leading social service organizations have and continue to try to integrate themselves into this formula of resident-led initiatives that the NNA has been at the forefront of for the past 20+ years.

The election in 1999 of a "Neighborhood Mayor," Mayor Bill Purcell, has been a key turning point for increasing the voice of neighborhood groups in city government and the decision-making process. Previous mayoral administrations had concentrated on big-ticket items, including a new arena with a pro-hockey team, a new stadium with a pro-football team, and other large downtown development projects. Mayor Purcell has changed that focus to neighborhood projects and schools. One of his first actions was creating the Mayor's Office of Neighborhoods to illustrate his commitment to the people who elected him.

With a new focus on neighborhoods in city government, more and more citizens want to join together to improve their neighborhoods. Whether the concern is crime, neighborhood conditions, social gatherings, affordable housing, or a thousand other things, residents are determined to participate in critical decisions being made every day that shape the future of their neighborhoods. "Community policing" is discussed by the police and by the community, with wavering steps forward being taken. "Neighborhood Watch" programs bring great promise and occasionally disappointment. Government and non-profit agencies are often looking to "the neighborhoods" for guidance in the types of services to offer. The Neighborhoods Resource Center is helping new groups to benefit from lessons learned by older neighborhood organizations, as well as working for real neighborhood participation in efforts by government and social service groups.

### **Neighbors Planning Neighborhoods**

In early 2000, the Planning Department began a partnership with the Neighborhoods Resource Center, the Nashville Neighborhood Alliance, the Mayor's Office of Neighborhoods, and the Metropolitan Development and Housing Agency. The mission of **Neighbors Planning Neighborhoods** (NPN) is to provide training and support services that enable neighborhood

Neighbors Planning Neighborhoods Partnership – Nashville, Tennessee

organizations to create and implement self-directed neighborhood plans and programs, thereby improving the quality of life in their neighborhood.

This partnership makes the most of each partner's resources to be supportive and involved in neighborhood planning -- sharing tools, resources, and information, while allowing neighborhood organizations to take the lead in planning their neighborhoods. By working together, more neighborhood information will be shared and more neighborhood plans will be completed each year. A key component of NPN is building on the Neighborhoods Resource Center's Leadership Training to further increase neighborhood leaders' knowledge and build capacity to take effective action on the issues that they, themselves, identify.

This is part of the Planning Department's initiatives to truly partner with the community and increase neighbors' voices in planning their communities, deciding their vision, and making key decisions about their future. Working with the NRC, the Planning Department provides neighborhood profiles with detailed neighborhood information, maps, and graphics to neighborhood organizations. These are also available on Planning's web site at [www.nashville.org/mpc](http://www.nashville.org/mpc) to make them easier to access. The Planning Department works closely with the Mayor's Office of Neighborhoods to increase citizen involvement in government and to create effective partnerships. Planners also use appearance preference surveys in their work with communities as a picture is indeed worth a thousand words when it comes to explaining planning terms and concepts. The Planning Department is currently reworking the county's 14 subarea plans to include neighborhood structure plans and detailed neighborhood design plans to better guide land use decisions.

## **Accomplishments**

During just the past 18 months, the Leadership Training component of the Neighborhoods Resource Center, has trained over 40 Neighborhood leaders. A majority of these neighborhood leaders went on to achieve one or more of their goals for their neighborhood.

The NRC's specialty training workshops, including "How the Zoning Process Works" and "Media Training Series," have provided over 100 neighborhood leaders with the technical knowledge necessary to be more effective in their community improvement work.

In the first training project of the **Neighbors Planning Neighborhoods** partnership, "Everything you wanted to know about the Metro Codes Department...but were afraid to ask!" the group engaged over 120 neighborhood leaders as active participants/customers on a Saturday morning. This action-based program not only provided neighborhoods with the tools necessary to take action on the issues that were important in their neighborhood — the partnership took the input of these leaders and changed the way that the Metro Codes Department works. This included changes to increase the responsiveness and accountability of this enormously important Metropolitan Department as well as streamlining the codes enforcement process and creating additional codes.

In another collaborative effort -- the Neighborhood Livability Project -- the Neighborhoods Resource Center, Tying Nashville Together and the Nashville Neighborhood Alliance worked with Metro Planning, Codes, and the Mayor's Office to train over 200 community volunteers to perform neighborhood audits for the Neighborhood Livability Project. They in turn scoured over 40 different neighborhoods for problems that impact the quality of life of residents. The result

was over 4000 items that Mayor Bill Purcell personally committed the Metropolitan Government of Davidson County to resolve. Currently, the group is working towards developing minimum standards of livability for Nashville's neighborhoods.

During the next 1 to 3 years we anticipate these capacity building programs will have helped to lay the foundation for realizing the vision of a system of strong resident-led comprehensive neighborhood planning and implementation processes. These processes will engage the capacity of public and private service organizations in the realization of community goals.

### **Leadership Training Series**

These trainings are conducted quarterly and alternate between beginning and advanced level curriculum. The beginning series is evening and/or weekend sessions that occur over a 3 to 6 session period. Beginning leadership training programs are focused on the skills necessary for indigenous leaders to take the leading role in identifying and addressing the needs of their community. The leadership training topics include: defining neighborhood strengths and relationships, discussing why people join and leave organizations, recruiting and engaging more members, organizing the neighborhood, developing relationships, planning and running effective meetings, and mapping out a problem-solving campaign.

The Advanced Level Training focuses on skill-sets that have been identified as important to their continuing efforts as leaders. These include, but are not limited to, "Planning and Implementing a Successful Neighborhood Audit," "Planning and Zoning in your Neighborhood," "Legal Issues and Organizations," "Media Relations Training," and "How to Work with Elected Officials." Additional topics will be developed to meet the expressed need of our neighborhood organizations.

### **How the Leadership Training Process Works**

- Neighbors apply to participate in the Neighborhood Leadership Training Series.
- Neighbors identify their neighborhood and its stakeholders.
- Neighbors increase their skills in creating partnerships with other stakeholders.
- Neighbors plan and conduct an effective action-oriented neighborhood meeting.
- Neighbors develop a strategy to address their neighborhood's issues.
- Neighbors achieve one of their neighborhood's community improvement goals.

### **Neighbors Planning Neighborhoods Training Series**

These trainings are conducted semi-annually and are designed to address the top issues that neighborhood leaders themselves have identified as important in their work to maintain and improve the quality of life in their neighborhoods. We will continue to focus on the specific unit of Metropolitan Government that is responsible for these issues and work with them to define their existing neighborhood service delivery system, as well as identify policy and procedural modifications that will enhance their department responsiveness and accountability to neighborhood leaders. This produces a training program that educates neighborhood leaders on how to make these systems work for them.

The **Neighbors Planning Neighborhoods** training series occurs on a semi-annual basis with individual training sessions being available on videotape for future learning experiences. These are conducted in a centrally located and accessible training facility.

## **How the Neighbors Planning Neighborhoods Training Process Works**

- Government agency agrees to work with Neighbors Planning Neighborhoods.
- Government agency works with NPN to identify the specific processes and reporting/accountability structure for their organization.
- Government agency and NIA host the Community Capacity Building Workshop.
- Neighbors participate in the Workshop.
- Neighbors increase their knowledge and understanding of the community building information that was presented.
- Neighbors develop a strategy to use their new knowledge to address their neighborhood's issues.
- Neighbors achieve one of their neighborhood's community improvement goals.
- Government agency identifies ways to make their organization more responsive to community needs.
- Government agency implements change that makes their organization more responsive to community needs.

**Neighbors Planning Neighborhoods** training builds on Leadership Training to provide neighbors with the skills and capacity to achieve their neighborhood goals. In the past, the Metro Planning Department has worked with neighborhoods to develop neighborhood plans. Often, these plans have been action plans that did not focus much on neighborhood design elements.

One area where the **Neighbors Planning Neighborhoods** partnership plays a key role is in assisting neighborhoods in developing their own neighborhood plans where they themselves are leading the effort. Where needed in a neighborhood, the neighborhood-led action plans would allow the NPN partners to build on these efforts. An example of this is the Metro Planning Department working with neighborhoods to develop neighborhood structure and design plans.

## **Next Steps**

**Neighbors Planning Neighborhoods** is currently seeking funding to further support our initiatives. The next department we plan to work with in developing a training workshop is the Metro Public Works Department.

There was a time when neighborhoods would not use the words “partner” and “Metro government” in the same sentence. We are glad to be a part of a new day dawning in Nashville where we can be partners and work together for change. Arthur Blum says “Neighborhood revitalization is dependent upon resident revitalization. One cannot build the physical infrastructure of a neighborhood without also building the social infrastructure.” Together, that is what **Neighbors Planning Neighborhoods** is doing as we press on.

## **Key Implementers involved in Neighbors Planning Neighborhoods Training**

*(in alphabetical order)*

**Michael M. Hodge, Project Manager at the Neighborhoods Resource Center**, is a twenty-year veteran of the neighborhood organizing business. Some of his most well known efforts have included the development of the Woodbine Community Organization, Organized Neighbors of Edgehill and South Nashville Action People – all of which are now active 501 c (3) organizations of their own.

He is also a specialist in Geographic Information Systems, developing computer maps and other information around neighborhood concerns. He has served as a consultant to neighborhoods in leadership development, creating affordable housing for low-income families, creative uses for federal funds, and getting results from the bureaucracy. He has a Master's Degree in Church and Community Ministry from Scarritt College here in Nashville.

**Anita McCaig, Neighborhood Planner with Nashville's Metropolitan Planning Department**, has 15 years of experience in working with neighborhood and ethnic groups in the U.S., Mexico, Central America, and Great Britain as well as working with Native American communities. In the Planning Department, her focus is on neighborhood planning, citizen participation, computer mapping, and partnerships. She is a founding partner of the Neighbors Planning Neighborhoods partnership and the Nashville's COOL (Communities Organized On-Line) project. In addition, she enjoys making understandable presentations, creating maps in ArcView Geographic Information Systems, and facilitating meetings where all voices are heard. She holds a Master's degree in Community & Regional Planning and a Master of Arts in Latin American Studies from the University of New Mexico as well as a Bachelor of Arts degree in English from Union University.

**John Stern, Executive Director of the Neighborhoods Resource Center**, is an entrepreneur whose extensive involvement in neighborhood empowerment has led him to be an acknowledged expert on Nashville's neighborhood organizations. He is an officer of the Nashville Neighborhood Alliance, past Chairman of the annual Nashville's Night Out Against Crime, co-founder of the Neighborhood Crime and Safety Council, Leader of Mayor Purcell's Neighborhoods Transition Team among many other activities. He has impressive credentials in marshalling local and citywide citizen based initiatives. John's high energy for evoking volunteer participation that is goal directed is a key ingredient in his success with grass-roots efforts. John has a Bachelor of Science Degree, with honors, in Business Management.

**Brenda Wynn** currently serves as **Director of the Mayor's Office of Neighborhoods**. She came to her position with extensive experience as a community volunteer in Nashville. In addition to having served as the president of the League of Women Voters of Nashville in recent years, Brenda has been an active volunteer in many other local organizations including the Nashville's Agenda Project, Women in the Nineties (WIN), Dede Wallace Center, the Leadership Nashville Alumni Association and Metro's Traffic and Parking Commission.

Prior to taking the position with the Mayor's Office of Neighborhoods in September 1999, Brenda spent nine years at Meharry Medical College where she served in a number of roles, including director of computer based testing, executive assistant to the president of the college and coordinator of the institution's Total Quality Management Program.

Neighbors Planning Neighborhoods Partnership – Nashville, Tennessee